



The Round Barn Theatre ®
Amish Acres ®
Nappanee, Indiana

Review

Plain and Fancy

(31st annual production)

2017

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Main Stage Production

Amish Acres

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By Frank Ramirez

“Plain and Fancy” enters its fourth decade

Nappanee, Ind. – March 21, 2017 -- Local folks in Elkhart County quickly realize that children permeate every aspect of Amish society. It is taken for granted that Amish children, whether at home on the farm, in the family business, or on trips to the market or other errands, are carrying their share of the work load not because anyone’s forcing them to, but because it’s natural for everyone in the family, from the oldest to the youngest, to play an active part.

Of course Amish children also play; but then, so do their elders. And we see that element of work, play, and belonging in this year’s thirty-first edition of “Plain and Fancy.” This flagship production at the National Home of “Plain and Fancy” includes the talents of Amelia Lowry, who plays the role of the child Sarah Miller.

Lowry has become something of a regular at the Round Barn Theatre in recent months. In “Plain and Fancy” we see her playing, working in the kitchen, helping with the chores, as well as mischievously watching everything to do with the star-crossed lovers Katie and Peter. She’s the one, even when Peter is shunned, who is willing to hug him, and who rejoices when he is restored.

Director Amber Burgess artfully weaves together the parallel worlds of Amish men and women. The two circles intersect at their society's predetermined places, but the Amish men and women also have their own separate communities.

Although Amish society seems strictly patriarchal, Kristin Brintall's incarnation of Katie Yoder is not afraid to make it clear that there will be a conversation between her and her father. Rather than being simply acted upon, this Katie Yoder directs the action in subtle and occasionally not-so-subtle ways. And thanks to her strong voice cutting through "Plain We Live," we recognize that Katie Yoder has religious as well as personal integrity.

I appreciated David Goins successful portrayal of Papa Yoder. We not only see this patriarch firmly uphold the faith, Goins also makes it clear that Yoder loves his daughter, and all the people of his family and community. There is joy here as well as a stiff backbone.

The relationship between the brothers Peter (Martin Flowers) and Ezra (Ian Conner) Reber is always a difficult one to portray. It verges on Cain and Abel and it is only with difficulty that it veers closer to the eventual reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. I like Conner's take on the brother who usurps his brother's place at the altar, at least temporarily. Although he gets what he wants in the first act -- the farm, the girl, and his brother banished, there is clear regret on his face during the barn raising.

Flowers has crafted a character who is flawed, but earnest, and certainly loving, a brother who in the end desires more to save Amish honor than let his brother become a prodigal.

Don Hart returns as Isaac Miller, who serves as something of a Greek Chorus to the action. Hart's wry yet practical outlook is a bedrock of his characterization. This, along with Katherine Barnes' version of his spouse Emma Miller provides the rock that acts as conscience and anchor for the embattled Yoder family. There's also their comedic and deft advocacy for the Amish lifestyle in their song, "City Mouse, Country Mouse."

At one point it was author Joseph Stern's intention to center the musical around the character of Hilda Miller. Through Laura Morgan we see Hilda escape from her parents suffocating expectations as well as her illusions about "English" life, returning with integrity and a little more dignity than earlier productions.

My favorite directorial choice was the decision to have the New Yorker Dan King snap a photograph of Hilda (on a wonderfully genuine antique camera) rather than kiss her on the forehead. Indeed, Ryan Schisler's King may be a little dense, or perhaps unperceptive, when it comes to Hilda and Ruth Winters' attraction for him, but we see King genuinely regretting the way his attempts to make things better backfire. He and Mikaela Brielle,

who plays Ruth Winters, also from New York, have a strong chemistry between them. Thanks to Brielle, Winters projects sensuality and a gently frustrated sexuality which allows her, like Katie, to assertively take control of things when it is time.

The set changes look smooth and well-practiced. Costumes, lighting, and other technical aspects of the show seem natural. Get out to enjoy “Plain and Fancy” this year as it enters its fourth decade, because even if you’ve seen it before, you’ll see it in a whole new light in 2017.

The Round Barn Theatre at Amish Acres presents “Plain and Fancy,” book by Joseph Stein and Will Glickman, Music by Albert Hague, Lyrics by Arnold Horwitt in repertory through October 14. For tickets and information call 800-800-4942 or go to www.amishacres.com